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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 003635

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY FOR ANNE KOHNEN, NNSA

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TAGS: [ENRG](#) [ECON](#) [MNUC](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [TRGY](#) [TSPL](#) [BG](#) [CH](#) [BGD](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESHI SCIENCE MINISTER WANTS NUCLEAR POWER PLANT; CONTACTS CHINESE

Classified By: Acting PolEcon Counselor David Renz; reason 1.4(d)(e)

1. (S) SUMMARY: Bangladesh's Minister of Science has told U.S. officials he wants to obtain a commercial nuclear reactor to supply electric power to Bangladesh. No other BDG ministry has expressed support for Khan's proposal. Khan has also approached the Chinese with his interest in a reactor, creating an opportunity for China to supply nuclear technology to Bangladesh. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) During a meeting in June between Washington visitors Anish Goel, Marcella Szymanski, EconOff and the Minister of Science, Information, Communication and Technology (SICT) Moyeen Khan, the Minister requested assistance from the U.S. in obtaining a nuclear power plant and training for nuclear physicists. On a second occasion, during a July 20 visit by EconOff to the office of C.S. Karim, the new Chair of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC), Karim stated, without elaborating, that the Science Minister wants to engage in increased cooperation with the U.S. Department of Energy. Karim later passed documents to EconOff relating to nuclear power reactors and research facilities.

3. (C) Following the July 20 meeting in his office at which radiological security measures and a Joint Science and Technology Agreement between the U.S. and Bangladesh were discussed, Karim accompanied EconOff to her car. It was at this point that Karim passed two English-language documents to EconOff. The first detailed the features of a type of nuclear power plant available for sale in the U.S. that is compatible with Bangladesh's power grid and financial capacity. The second document outlined U.S. laboratories at which Bangladeshi scientists might be able to obtain training in nuclear technology.

4. (S) In this private conversation, Chairman Karim said that the Minister was also "working with another country" and that this other country "did not have peaceful purposes in mind." From the context of both the formal meeting and the subsequent private conversation, EconOff believes Karim meant to convey that Minister Khan had also approached China with his request to obtain a nuclear reactor. Bangladesh recently signed a series of cooperation agreements with China, including one on the use of nuclear technology that is publicly described as being for medicine and other benign research pursuits, adding further context to the conversation. Karim's cryptic reference to the 'other country' not having "peaceful purposes in mind" may have been a reference to dual use technology or a more general editorial comment to the effect that China's interests in cooperating with Bangladesh on civilian nuclear matters were less than altruistic.

5. (S) The Minister of Science is a nuclear physicist by training and trade, having taught at Dhaka University before joining the BNP government. He has reportedly fallen out of favor with the Prime Minister for poor performance with his portfolio. Chairman Karim is also a trained and practicing nuclear scientist. He is a frequent contact of EconOff from his days as a BAEC Board Member and his work to get DOE radiological security contracts approved by the Minister of Science. Karim's recent promotion to Chairman of the BAEC by the Prime Minister's Office indicates that his star is rising.

6. (S) COMMENT: Bangladesh faces a chronic shortage of electric generating capacity and the Prime Minister's Office is keen to obtain commitments for new capacity prior to elections in 2006/07. Minister Khan may see obtaining a commercial nuclear power plant as a way for the Science Ministry to get in on this high profile issue, which principally falls under the Ministry of Energy, Power and Natural Resources. (Prime Minister Zia is also the Energy, Power and Natural Resources Minister). Khan probably sees a reactor as a logical choice, given his background. Karim seemed somewhat ambivalent about the idea of a nuclear power plant, but said that he felt it was good for Bangladesh, apparently recognizing the contribution it could make to the country's power generation requirements.

7. (S) COMMENT CONTINUED: It does not appear that Khan's interest in a nuclear reactor has support from other

ministries or the PM's Office. Nor does Khan appear interested in non-peaceful uses of nuclear technology. Khan has, however, created an opening for China to introduce nuclear technology to Bangladesh. It remains to be seen whether China will seek to take advantage of this opportunity. END COMMENT.  
CHAMMAS